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No. 9.—CONTAINING :—

THE P. L. M. EXPRESS	By Jacques Normand.
THE CONSCIENTIOUS BURGLAR ...	By Grant Allen.
CATISSOU	By Jules Claretie.

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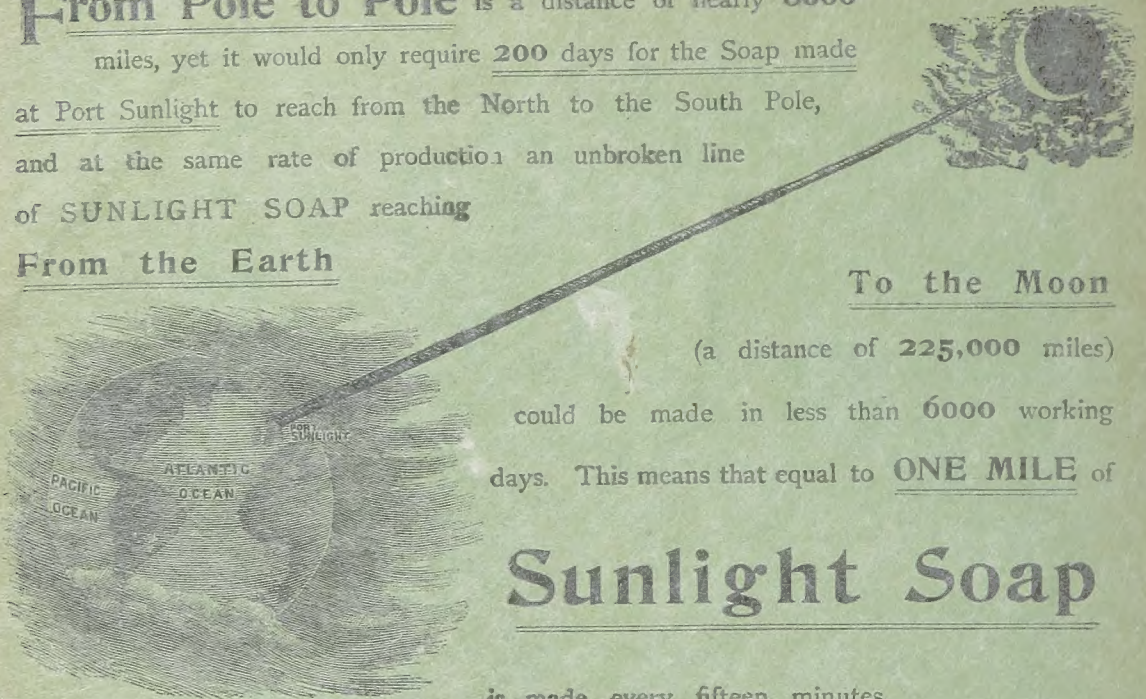
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Illustrated Penny Tales.

The P. L. M. Express.

From the French of Jacques Normand.

THERE was a general astonishment in our little circle of friends when we heard of the approaching marriage of Valentin Sincère. What! he?—the hardened celibate! the Parisian sceptic, rebelling against all matrimonial ideas!—the joyous free-liver who had a hundred times sworn that he would never have anything to do with it! Valentin, after all, was going to join the great brotherhood! And, of all women, whom was he going to marry?—a widow! We were bewildered.

So, the first time I met him, I button-holed him, and demanded explanations.

"I've hardly time to speak to you—a heap of things to do. I have just come from the Mairie, and am on my way to Stern's, the engraver, in the Passage du Panoramas, to get some invitation letters. If you'll go with me—"

"If I'll go with you!" I said.

We were in front of the Madeleine. We passed down the boulevards arm-in-arm.

"The story's a very simple one," he said. "Common-place to the last degree; but, since you want so much to know about it, here it is:—"

"In the month of February last I was going to Nice for the Carnival fêtes. I have the greatest aversion to travelling by night, and I therefore took the 8.55 morning train, due at midnight at Marseilles, where I proposed spending the following day with my friends, the Rombauds, who expected me to breakfast. The next morning I was going on to Nice, where I was to arrive at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"At the station there was an excited crowd; but, thanks to the proverbial obligingness of M. Regnoul, the station-master, I was able to secure a place in the only *coupé* in the train. The only other occupant was a gentleman with a red rosette in a button-hole of his overcoat—a gentleman of severe aspect, and with an administrative air, whose luggage consisted solely of a portfolio. Assuredly he was not going far with that outfit, and presently I should be alone. Alone! the only thing to make a railway journey supportable!

"All the passengers were in their places, and the train was about starting, when the sound of a dispute arose at the door.

"No, monsieur, no!" said the voice of a woman, fresh in tone, and with an almost imperceptible Southern accent. 'I ordered a sleeping-compartment, and a sleeping-compartment I must have.'

"But, madame, I have told you, we haven't one!"
"You ought to have carried out the instructions in my letter."

"We have not received any letter, madame!"

"Have another carriage put on, then."

"Impossible!—we have already the regulation number. Come, come, make haste; the train is about to start."

"Well, I must have a place found for me."

"I have offered you two, madame, in the *coupé*."

"There?"

"Yes, madame—there!"

A little, dark-haired woman appeared in the doorway, and instantly started back, as if in alarm.

"There are two gentlemen in it!"

"Good heavens, madame! I can't give you a whole carriage to yourself!"

"Very well, then; I will not go!"

"As you please. The train is off—I am going to give the signal."

"Stay, monsieur; stay. I *must* absolutely go; and since there is only this *coupé*—but you'll let me have a sleeping-compartment at the first station we come to?"

"Yes, madame."

"You'll telegraph for it?"

"Yes, yes, madame."

"You promise me?"

"Yes, madame."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes, yes, madame!"

The door was thrown open wide, and the little brown-haired lady, surrounded by half a carriage-load of parcels and wraps, entered the *coupé*; a shrill whistle, and—we were off.

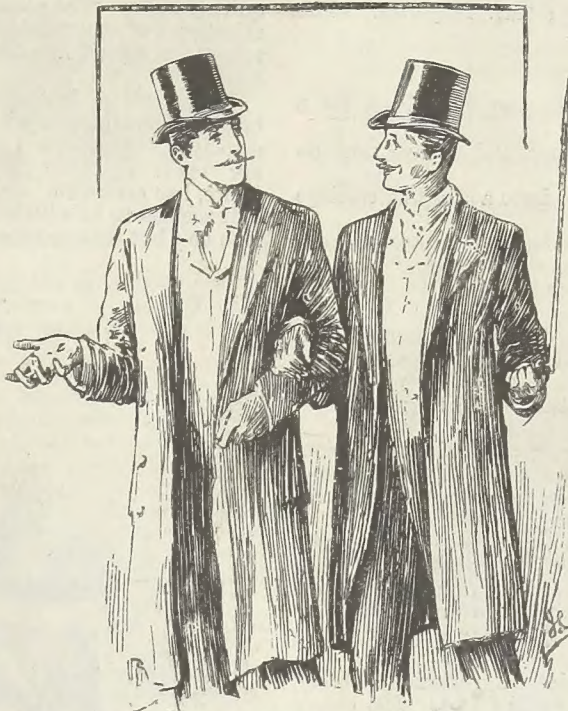
Gallantly the administrative gentleman seated himself by my side, so as to leave the opposite seat entirely at the service of the new arrival.

"Without even turning her eyes towards us, flustered and red with anger, she arranged her parcels around her with the ordinary haste of persons who have long hours to pass in a railway-carriage.

"She had one bag, two bags, three bags, and, as to wraps——!"

"Out of the corner of my eyes I watched the little proceedings, and I observed with pleasure that she was a charming little personage. I say with pleasure; for, in truth, it is always more agreeable to have a pretty woman for a travelling companion than an ugly one.

"It was very cold. The country, covered with snow, and lit up by a very pale-faced sun, flew rapidly by on either side of the carriage. The little lady, muffled up



"WE PASSED DOWN THE BOULEVARDS."



"SHE ARRANGED HER PARCELS."

to her chin in rugs and other wraps, turned her gaze obstinately out of the farther window; the administrative gentleman put his papers, yellow, green, and blue, with printed headings, in order, and read them attentively; as to myself, comfortably installed in a corner with my feet on the foot-warmer, I waded through the file of newspapers I had bought at the station to pass the time.

"11.21; Laroche. The train stopped. The administrative gentleman gathered up his papers, rose, bowed, and descended from the carriage. His feet had hardly touched the platform before he was received by the station-master, who called him 'Mr. Inspector.' The lady leaned out of the door:—

"Mr. Station-master!"

"Madame?"

"They were to telegraph to you from Paris for a sleeping-carriage."

"They have done so, madame, and I have sent on the message."

"Sent it on! Am I not to have a sleeping-carriage at once, then?"

"Impossible, madame; we have no carriages here. They can only furnish you with one at Lyons."

"At Lyons! At what o'clock?"

"At 5.45, madame."

"At the end of the journey! But, monsieur, I can't remain in this *coupé* until that time! Impossible! I won't!"

"Take care, madame, the train is starting!"

"It started."

"She threw herself into her corner again, in a furious pet, without casting a glance at me. I plunged once more into the contents of my newspapers—into the contents of the tenth, that is to say.

"Shall I confess it? That paper took me longer to read than its nine predecessors. Twenty times I began the same line; I believe that at least for some time the paper was upside down. Hang it, one can't be shut up for a long journey with a pretty woman without feeling some sort of emotion.

"I greatly wanted to enter into conversation with her, but what pretext for doing it could I find? The classic resources of putting up or down the windows, in such a state of the temperature, were non-available. What was there to do?—launch a commonplace remark of some kind? Better a hundred times keep silent than do that. My companion, I had seen at a glance with my Parisian eyes, was a woman of the best society. To speak to her brusquely, without being known to her, would have made me appear in her eyes no better than a vulgar commercial traveller. The only way of drawing her into conversation would be to find something strikingly original to say to her; but what?—what? I sought laboriously, but did not find.

"I was still continuing that search, when the train stopped suddenly, thanks to the powers of the new brake—so good against accidents, but so bad for passengers.

"'Tonnerre!—twenty-five minutes' stoppage!' cried a porter, opening the carriage-door.

"My companion rose, threw off her rugs, which, with her three bags, she left in the carriage, and descended on to the platform. It was noon. Hunger had begun to make itself felt. She moved towards the buffet on the left, across the line.

"I followed her. I was then enabled to admire at my ease the elegance of her figure, well set-off by a long fur mantle. I remarked also that she had a pretty neck, a grey felt hat, and very tiny feet.

"At the entrance to the buffet stood the manager. Wearing a velvet cap and bearing a striking resemblance to

Napoleon III., he pointed out with his hand and with a napkin a long table to be taken by assault.

"I entered with a crowd of travellers—ruffled, hurried; in short, that stream of persons, essentially grotesque and derogatory to human beauty, of an express train, bent all on devouring food of some sort.

"I seated myself and hastily swallowed the succession of dishes set before me: my lady traveller took some soup at a separate table.

"I was amongst the first to rise, and went out upon the platform to smoke a cigarette. The twenty-five minutes—reduced to twenty, according to rule—were quickly spent. The passengers came in groups from the refectory and returned to their places in the carriages. I reinstalled myself in mine. My fellow-traveller did not appear.

"I perceived her at the little bookstall on the opposite side of the line, looking over the volumes displayed. Although I could see nothing of her but her back, I easily recognised her by her pretty figure, her otter-skin mantle, and her grey hat. Her hair seemed to be a little less dark than I had imagined it to be; but that was the effect of distance, no doubt.



"SHE TOOK SOME SOUP AT A SEPARATE TABLE."

"All the passengers had resumed their seats, and the porters were banging-to the doors.

"She'll be left behind!" I thought. "She's mad!" "Madame! Madame!" I called to her out of the window.

"She was too far off, and did not hear me.

"The whistle sounded; the train was going to start. What was to be done? Prompt as a flash of lightning, an idea shot through my brain. She would be left there in the horrible cold without her luggage! Let her, poor woman, at least have her smaller belongings.



"I THREW THE WHOLE TO A MAN."

"I gathered up, in an armful, her three bags and her rugs, and threw the whole to a man in the uniform of the railway, who was on the line near the carriage.

"For that lady over there," I cried.

"The man in the uniform carried the articles in the direction of the lady at the bookstall. At the same moment the carriage door on the opposite side—the side next the platform—was opened, and my travelling companion, grumbled at by a station porter, hurried into the carriage, and the train started. Horror! I had mistaken the traveller. The lady at the bookstall was not the right one; the same mantle, same hat, same figure—but not she! It is perfectly absurd, how much women resemble one another—the back view of them. I had made a pretty mess of it!

"She had hardly entered the carriage before she uttered a shriek.

"My parcels! Somebody has stolen my parcels!"

"And, for the first time, she turned her eyes on me, with a look—good heavens!—with a look never to be forgotten.

"No, madame," I stammered, "your parcels have not been stolen; they—they have been left behind at Tonnerre."

"At Tonnerre! How?"

"I explained all to her. By Jove! my dear fellow, I can't describe the second look she darted at me; but, I assure you, I firmly believe I shall remember it even longer than the first.

"I am distressed, madame," I further stammered, "distressed exceedingly; but the motive was a good one: I thought that you were going to miss the train—that you

would be cold—and—and I did not wish that you should be cold; in short—forgive me, and do not be uneasy in regard to your property, which is in safe hands—a man in uniform. At the next station you can telegraph—we will telegraph—and your things will be immediately sent on. Ah!—you shall have them, I vow, even though I have myself to go back to Tonnerre to fetch them."

"Enough, monsieur! I know what I have to do."

"Stormily she rearranged herself in her corner, tugging pettishly at her gloves.

"But, alas, poor little thing! she had counted without the cold—she no longer had her warm rugs and wraps about her. At the end of ten minutes she began to shiver. It was in vain that she tried to huddle herself up, to draw her otter-skin mantle closer to her form: she positively shivered with the cold.

"Madame," I said, "I beg of you, on my knees, to accept my rug. You will catch cold—and it will be my fault—and I should never, to the end of my days, forgive myself!"

"I did not speak to you, monsieur," she said, sharply.

"I was nervous—excited. In the first place, she was charming; in the next place, I was furiously annoyed with myself for the stupid blunder I had made: in short, I found myself in one of those predicaments that call for the taking of strong resolutions.

"Madame," I said, "accept this rug, or I swear to you I will throw myself out on to the line!"

"And flinging the rug between her and me, I opened the window and seized the outer handle of the door-lock.

"Was I determined?—between ourselves, not altogether, I think; but it appeared that I had the air of being so, for she instantly cried out:—

"You are mad, monsieur, you are mad!"

"The rug—or I throw myself out!"

"She took the covering, and in a softened tone said:—

"But you, monsieur—you will catch your death of cold."

"Do not be uneasy on my account, madame; I am not in the least chilly—and, even if I should feel cold, it will only be a just punishment for my unpardonable stupidity."

"Say your over-hastiness; for, as you have said,



"YOU ARE MAD, MONSIEUR."

your motive was a good one. But how came you to mistake another lady for me?

"Because she appeared to me charming!"

"She smiled. The ice was broken—the ice of conversation, that is to say; for, in other respects, I was shivering with cold.

"But how quickly I forgot the cold, the journey—everything! She was delicious, exquisite, adorable! She possessed a cultivated mind, keen, gay, original! She loved travel, like myself. In literature, in music, in everything, in fact, we had the same tastes! And then—only imagine!—we found we had a heap of acquaintances in common; she was intimate with the Saint-Chamas, with the Savenois; above all, with the Montbazons! Only to think that I had perhaps met her twenty times in their drawing-rooms without having noticed her! Good heavens! where had my eyes been?

"She spoke simply, amiably, with the frankness I so much love. A slight, very slight, provincial accent, almost imperceptible, a chirp rather, giving to her pronunciation something of the singing of a bird. It was intoxicating!

"But though I would have given all the world not to appear cold—great heavens, how cold I was!

"At Dijon (2.20) my right foot was half-frozen. We telegraphed to Tonnerre for the articles left behind.

"At Mâcon (4.30) it was the turn of my left foot. We received a message from Tonnerre, saying that the luggage would arrive in Marseilles next day.

"At Lyon-Perranche (5.48) my left hand became insensible; she forgot to demand her sleeping-carriage.

"At Valence (8.3) my right hand followed the example of the left; I learned that she was a widow and childless.

"At Avignon (9.59) my nose became violet; I fancied she had never wholly loved her first husband.

"At Marseilles (12.5 a.m.) I sneezed three times violently; she handed me back my rug, and said, graciously: 'Au revoir!'

"'Au revoir!' Oh, I was mad with delight.

"I spent the night at the Hôtel de Noailles—an agitated night, filled with remembrance of her. The next morning, when I awoke, I had the most shocking cold in the head imaginable.

"Could I in such a state present myself to my friends, the Rombauds? There was no help for it; it was one of the accidents of travel; they must take me as I was, and to-morrow I would go and seek my cure in the sun of Nice.

"Oh, my friend, what a surprise! That good fellow Rombaud had invited a few friends in my honour, and among them was my charming fellow-traveller! my charmer!

"When I was presented to her, a smile passed over her lips; I bowed and asked, in a whisper:—

"'Tonnerre—your parcels?'

"'I have them,' she replied, in the same tone.

"We sat down to table.

"'What a cold in the head you have got, my dear fellow!' cried Rombaud, sympathetically; 'where the deuce did you pick it up—in the railway-carriage, perhaps?'

"'Very possibly,' I said; 'but I don't regret it!'

"Nobody comprehended the sense of this veiled reply; but I felt the tender glance of my fellow-traveller reach me through the odorous steam of a superb tureen of soup majestically posed upon the table.

"What more have I to tell you? Next day I set off for Nice in a fortnight hence I am to be married."



The Conscientious Burglar.

By Grant Allen

GUY LETHBRIDGE had got into debt. That was reprehensible, of course; but when we were *very* young, most of us did the same thing; and in Guy's case, at least, there were extenuating circumstances. When a fellow's twenty-four, and has been brought up like a gentleman, he's apt to fall into the familiar fallacy that "we *must* live!" and if he has nothing to live upon, why, then he lives upon other people. Now, Guy Lethbridge was a painter, without visible means of support except his art; and he glided into debt by a natural and easy transition which even that sternest of censors, the judge of the Bankruptcy Court, might well have condoned as next door to inevitable.

The facts of the case were these. Guy had gone over to Germany with a knapsack on his back, an



"WITH A KNAPSACK AND AN EASEL."

easel in his hands, and a pipe and a few pounds in his trousers pocket. He had no friends to speak of in those days, for his father was dead, and his mother, good lady, in her lodgings in Bayswater, could no more have sent her son a five-pound note from her slender pension, than she could have sent him the Koh-i-noor or the Order of the White Elephant. But Guy went abroad, none the less, with the reckless faith of the Salvationist or the impecunious artist. He meant to stay on the Rhine as long as his money lasted; "and then, you know, my dear fellow, I can smuggle myself across anyhow, in a cattle boat or something; and arrive with a sixpence and an immortal work at St. Katharine's Docks, some fine summer day, at six o'clock in the morning." What a blessed thing it is, to be sure, to be born into this world with the easy-going, happy-go-lucky, artistic temperament!

So Guy went to Königswinter, with a glimpse by the way at Brussels, Aix, and Cologne; and settled himself down, pipe, easel, and all, to summer quarters at the bright and sunny Berliner-Hof. There he worked really hard, for he was no saunterer by nature; his impecuniosity arose, strange to say, neither from want of industry nor want of talent, but from pure force of circumstances. There's no sillier blunder on earth, indeed, than to believe that if a man doesn't succeed in life he must needs be either an idler or a bungler.

Only fools imagine that industry and ability ~~can~~ command success; wise men know well that opportunity and luck count at least as equally important. Guy Lethbridge's time had not yet come. He painted all summer up and down the Rhine, making Königswinter his headquarters, and dropping down by boat or rail from day to day to various points on either bank that took his fancy. As for black and white, his quiver was full of them. The Drachenfels from the north, the Drachenfels from the south; the Rheinstein from above, the Rheinstein from below, the Rheinstein from St. Clement's—he sketched them all till he was well-nigh tired of them. Meanwhile, he worked steadily at his grand Academy picture of "The Seven Mountains from the Summit of the Petersberg." His plan of campaign, in short, was own brother to every other struggling young artist's. He meant to do "a lot of little pot-boilers for the illustrated magazines, don't you know, or the weekly papers," and to live upon those while he devoted his energies to the real Work of Art which was to raise him with a bound to the front rank of living painters. Wyllie had done it, you see, with his great Thames picture; so why shouldn't Guy Lethbridge? The Chantrey Bequest was meant on purpose for the encouragement of such works as the "Seven Mountains from the Summit of the Petersberg." The trustees were bound to buy it as soon as they saw it hung on the line at the Academy; for they are men of taste, and men of knowledge, and men of experience; and if they don't know a good thing when they see it, what's the use of an Academy, anyway, I ask you?

Incredible as it may seem, however, the pot-boilers failed to boil the pot. Guy sent his sketches, with elucidatory remarks, to the editors of nearly every illustrated paper in Great Britain and Ireland or the adjacent islands; who declined them with thanks, and with surprising unanimity. They were the same sketches, to be sure, which ran afterwards through eight numbers of a leading art review, and were then reproduced as an illustrated gift-book, which our most authoritative critic pronounced in *The Bystander* to be "the gem of the season." But *that* was *after* Guy Lethbridge became famous. At the time, those busy editors didn't look at the drawings at all, or, if they looked at them, observed with the weary sigh peculiar to the overworked editorial organism, "Ah, the Rhine again! Overdone, decidedly. The public won't stand any more Rhine at any price." For those were the days when there was a run on the Thames and our domestic scenery; and everybody who was anybody lodged his easel in a house-boat.

Thus it gradually happened that while the Great Work progressed, the pipe got smoked out, and the pounds evaporated. Guy had lived sparingly at the Berliner-Hof—very sparingly, indeed. He had breakfasted early on his roll and coffee; bought a penn'orth of bread and a bunch or two of grapes for his frugal lunch on the hills where he painted; and dined *à la carte*, when daylight failed, off the cheapest and most sustaining of the landlord's dishes. His drink was Bavarian beer, or more latterly, water; yet, in spite of economy, the marks slipped away with surprising nimbleness; and by the end of September, Guy woke up one morning without even the talisman of that proverbial sixpence which was to land him in safety at the Port of London.

He had delayed things too long: hoping against hope, he had believed to the last that the *Porte-Crayon* or the *Studio* must surely accept his graceful and easy Rhenish sketches. He knew they were clever; he knew they had qualities; and he couldn't believe in his innocent



"LUNCH ON THE HILLS."

soul all the art-editors of his country were an amalgamated pack of Banded Duffers. Somebody must surely see merit at last in his "Royal Stolzenfels"; somebody must surely descry in the end the fantastic exuberance of his "Hundred-towered Andernach." So he waited and waited on, expecting every day some change in his fortunes, till the fatal moment at length arrived when he paid his last mark for his lunch in the mountains, and found himself face to face with an empty exchequer, and nothing on earth to get back to England with.

It was a Wednesday when the fact of his utter penury forced itself finally upon him. He paid his bill by the week, and he had still till Monday next before he would stand in urgent need of money. Monday was pay-day, and his time would be up; it would then be either stump up or go; on Monday he must confront the last abyss of poverty.

To that extent, only, Guy had got into debt. So I think you will admit with me his offence was a venial one. On Thursday he went to work on the Petersberg as usual. He was outwardly calm—but he ate no luncheon. In point of fact, he hadn't a pfennig to get one with. He might have asked for something at the hotel, and taken it with him to the hill-top; but that would have been a deviation from his ordinary routine; the "arrangement" at the Berliner-Hof included only the early coffee and a simple late dinner; and Guy felt that to ask for anything more in his present impecunious condition of pocket would be nothing short of robbing the landlord. He was robbing him as it was, to be sure; but, then, that was inevitable: he didn't like to add by any unusual demand to the weight of his probably insoluble indebtedness.

On Friday morning he woke up ravenous. What was a roll and coffee to a vigorous young man like him, with yesterday's unappetized hunger still keenly whetting the edge of his appetite? Unsatisfied and despondent, he toiled up the Petersberg once more—not for such as him the aristocratic joys of the cog-wheel railway; and in the eye of the sun he painted all day with unabated ardour at his "Seven Mountains." He painted with wild energy, impelled by want of food and internal craving. It suited his theme. He got lights upon the Löwenburg that he never could have got after a hearty dinner; he touched in some autumn tints among the woods on the Drachenfels too poetical for a man who has eaten and drunk of German sausage and foaming Pilsener. At the same time, Guy was conscious to himself that hunger was rapidly turning him into a rabid Socialist. Hitherto, as becomes an artist, he had believed on the whole in our existing social and political

institutions—baronial castles, lords and ladies gay in exquisitely paintable silks and satins, the agreeable variety imparted to life by pleasing distinctions of rank and wealth, the picturesque rags and sweet, tumble-down cottages of a contented peasantry. But now, when the unequal distribution of wealth began to affect him personally, he felt where the shoe pinched, and realized with a sudden revulsion of feeling that there was something rotten in the state of our Denmark. He said to himself more than once he wasn't one of your vile Radicals who want to upset everything—the Church, the throne, the peerage, the cathedrals, art, literature, and science, at one fell blow; but he certainly *would* like to see a fresh deal of the money.

Tourists strolled up, jingling the nickels in their pockets; they sat down at the terrace of the hotel on the hill-top—the inevitable "restauration" of every German point of view—and ordered beef-steaks and Rhine wine with a lordly carelessness which to Guy, in his present straits, seemed positively inhuman. Why should these pampered creatures thus flaunt their wealth before the eyes of more deserving though less successful

fellow-beings? To be sure, in the days of his own opulence, when he still had a five-pound note of his own in his pocket, Guy had often done the same sort of thing himself and thought no ill of it. But hunger is a great teacher of advanced political economy to men. As he painted and starved, with the vision of Monday's bill floating ever before his eyes, Guy Lethbridge felt he was sinking by rapid and uncontrollable stages into abysses of pure, unadulterated Communism.

Friday's dinner served only to make him feel more conscious than ever on Saturday of an aching void. He was tired as well as hungry when he reached the hill-top; his hand was far from being steady enough for purposes of painting. Nevertheless, he worked on, those autumn tints glowing brighter than ever as the afternoon wore away. About four o'clock, an Englishman, whom he had seen more than once at the Berliner-Hof, strolled casually up to him. Guy disliked that Englishman; he was tall and blustering, and had an ineffable air of wealthy insolence, which in Guy's present mood seemed peculiarly offensive to him. He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every night off roast pheasant and Heidsieck's dry monopole. But this afternoon he came up with his hands in his pockets, and inspected Guy's picture with the air of a connoisseur. "Jolly good light on the Thingumbob-berg," he said, shutting one eye and surveying it critically. "You've caught the colour well. If you go on like that, in the course of a century or so you ought, I should say, to make a painter."

Guy was annoyed at the man for this complacent speech; for in his own opinion, though he was by no means conceited, he was a painter already. So he drew himself up and answered, stiffly, "I'm glad you like the light; I've spent some pains on it."

"Pains!" the stranger echoed. "I should think you just had. It surprises me, the trouble you fellows will take over the corner of a picture. It's the right way, of course; that's how pictures are made; you can't make 'em any other way; but I couldn't do it, bless you—I'm such a jolly lazy beggar—fiddling and faddling for a week at a time over a tree or a trinket. I never did a stroke of work in my life, myself, and I admire you fellows who can; you must have such a precious reserve of energy." And he took out a first-rate cigar from his case as he spoke, and proceeded, with elaborate dawdling, to light it. To Guy, whose poor pipe had been stopped for three weeks, the mere smell of that cigar was positive purgatory.

The stranger, however, was in no hurry to go. He sat down on a rock, and began conversing about Art, of

which, indeed, Guy was forced somewhat grudgingly to admit he wasn't wholly ignorant. Little by little, after a while, the talk glided off into other channels. True, Guy's part in it was mainly monosyllabic; but the stranger, who had been put into conversational cue by a bottle of good wine at the restauration hard by, made up for all deficiencies on his neighbour's part by a very frank garrulousness. In the course of conversation, it gradually came out that the stranger was a landed proprietor of means, in the horsey interest. His talk was of races. He wondered fellows could spend such a lot of time doing a really good picture like that for a miserable hundred or so—how it made Guy's mouth water!—when he himself had won twenty ponies last week, over a special tip for the Leger, as easy as look at it. He went on to talk of so many winnings and so few losings, that Guy's newly-kindled democratic fire blazed up fiercer than ever.

That evening, at the Berliner-Hof, Guy watched the stranger, from his modest table in the corner, hobnobbing over a couple of bottles of sparkling Moselle with two German officers, whose acquaintance he had picked up quite casually in the restaurant. He was talking German fluently at the top of his voice, laughing loudly between whiles, and offering to bet everybody a hundred marks even, on whatever turned up, with hilarious inconsequence. A hundred marks would have relieved poor Guy from all his embarrassments. He was almost tempted to take the man on spec more than once, and pocket it if he won, or owe it, if he lost, to him. But that would be mean—nay, more, would be robbery.

Not such the stuff of which to make a successful burglar.

As Guy went upstairs to his room that night, he paused to ask the landlord the rich stranger's name. German as he was, the landlord gave it with the bated breath of an Englishman: "Sir Richard Lavers," he answered, in a most deferential tone. A man who can drink champagne like that, of course, secures the respect of every right-minded landlord.

Guy sat up late in his room, full of mingled perplexities. He couldn't go to bed; but about half-past ten the moonlight on the river was so exquisitely beautiful, that he stole down to the balcony on the first floor to admire it. He stood there long, making notes for future pictures. The balcony runs along the whole south side of the Berliner-Hof, looking out on the Rhine and the Seven Mountains. Guy paced it to the end about half-past eleven. The last window towards the west stood open down to the balcony; Guy glanced in as he passed, and heard loud, stertorous breathing. He recognised that stout snore. It was the English baronet's.

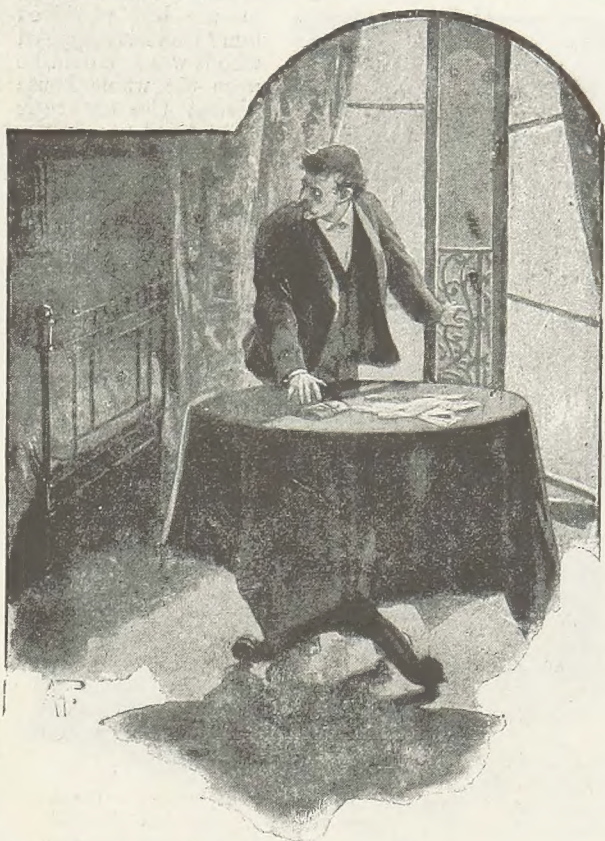
Some nameless curiosity made him peer into the bedroom. The moonlight was flooding it, so that he could see everything almost as well as if it had been day. In the corner stood the bed, and the stranger's clothes were flung carelessly on a chair; but on the table close by Guy observed, at a glance, his watch, a purse, a few tumbled papers.

That purse contained, no doubt, what remained of those ponies he had won on the St. Leger. It contained the ill-gotten wealth of those nights at the club, of whose baccarat he had spoken that afternoon with such unholy gusto. A loan of a fiver would just then be of incalculable benefit to Guy. When he sold the Seven Mountains for that paltry two hundred, as the baronet called it—though fifty pounds would have exceeded Guy's utmost expectations—he could repay the unwilling loan with twenty per cent. interest. To borrow in dire distress from a man who confesses he never did a stroke of honest work in his life, and who lives like a canker on the earnings of the community, was surely no crime. It would do this fellow good to be stinted in his drink for three days in a week. Just a hundred marks! And he would never miss them!

The artistic temperament must not be judged too severely by the stern moralist. It acts upon impulse,

and repents at leisure. Next moment, Guy found himself six paces in the room, his hand on the purse, his heart beating high, then standing still within him.

He meant to open it and take out a hundred marks.



"HIS HAND ON THE PURSE"

He would pay his bill next day, set out for Cologne, and send Sir Richard a written acknowledgment of the sum abstracted. The fellow, though blustering, was good-humoured enough. He would understand this move; nay, sympathize with its boldness, its slight tinge of the adventurous.

Just as he thought this the stertorous breathing grew suddenly less regular. Something turned heavily in the bed in the corner. It was now or never—and the purse wouldn't open! It had one of those nasty new-fangled clasps. Why do people always try to make life more complex for us? Do what he would, he couldn't open it. More rustling in the bed; Guy grew nervous and ashamed. Great heavens! What was this? The man would awake, and take him for a burglar!

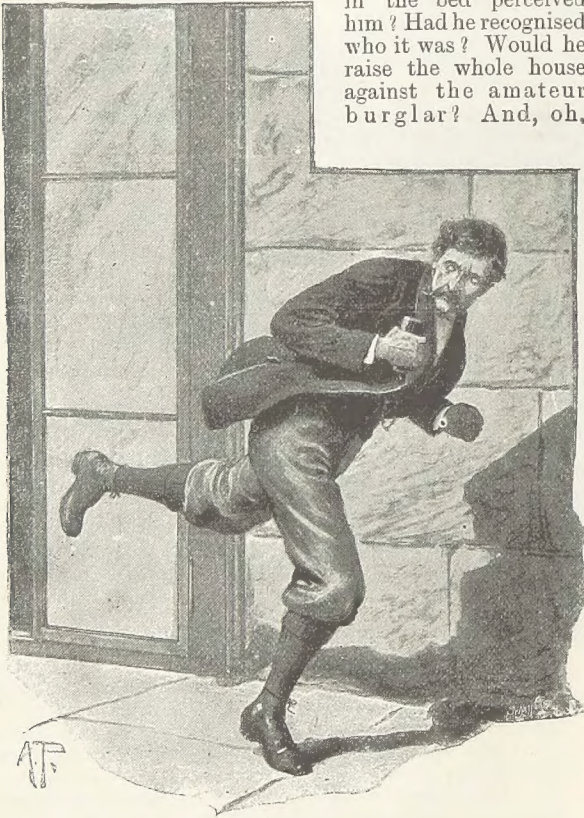
And a burglar he was, in truth and deed! As he realized that idea he recoiled with horror.

Before he could collect himself, however; before he could draw back from this half-uncompleted crime; before he could let conscience get the better of impulse—why, the man in the bed gave another sharp turn, and, scarcely knowing what he did, Guy, instead of dropping the incriminating purse, clutched it tight in his hand, and darted back on to the balcony. Thence, maddened by the wild sense of someone unseen pursuing him, he dashed away to the passage door, along the dim, dark corridor, stumbled up the great stairs, and groped his way, in an agony of horror, into his own bedroom.

Once arrived there, he locked and double-locked the door, flung that hateful purse on the table in the dark, and sank on the sofa in a tumult of remorse, alarm, and terror. If he hadn't been an artist, indeed, he would never have dreamt in the first instance of taking it. It was that impulsive artistic nature that misled him into translating his new political theories from the

domain of abstract hypothesis to the solid region punishable by the Revised Criminal Code of Germany. For many minutes he sat there, wondering, doubting,

fearing: had the man in the bed perceived him? Had he recognised who it was? Would he raise the whole house against the amateur burglar? And, oh,



"HE DASHED AWAY."

whatever came of it, let consequences alone, what hateful thing was this he had been so hastily led into? He held his brow in his hands and looked blankly into the dark. He felt himself a thief! He despised his own act with all the contempt and loathing of which his nature was capable.

At last he summoned up courage to light the candle, and in a mechanical sort of way, out of pure curiosity, began to examine the contents of the purse he had stolen. Worse and worse! This was horrible! German gold, English bank-notes, letters of credit, foreign bills of exchange, bankers' cheques—untold wealth in every form and variety of currency. The man must have carried some seven or eight hundred pounds about his person. And that wasn't all, either. There were letters in the purse, too—letters which, of course, Guy couldn't dream of looking at; for he was a gentleman still, even though he was a criminal. Letters and memoranda, and little knick-knacks and trinkets, and—what touched Guy to the heart like the thrust of a sharp knife—one lock of a child's light hair, half protruding from a paper. Stung with worse remorse than before, the conscience-stricken burglar bundled them back into the purse, feeling hot in the face at this unwarrantable intrusion on another man's privacy. To effect an involuntary loan upon a sleeping fellow-citizen, overburdened with too much wealth and unduly surfeited with more than his share of our unearned increment, seemed to Guy in his present communistic mood a very small matter; but to go prying into another man's letters, his documents, his keepsakes, his most sacred deposits—that was unpardonable crime, which his very soul shrank from.

It was impossible for him, then, to keep Sir Richard's belongings. He began to reflect with deep regret on the inconvenience it would cause any man to be suddenly

deprived, at a single swoop, of eight hundred pounds, his passport, and his visiting-cards. For it was a big, fat purse, of most capacious dimensions; and it contained almost everything of a mercantile or identificatory nature which Sir Richard took about with him. Besides, there were the letters, the lock of hair, the knick-knacks. To hit a fellow in the purse is all very well in its way, but to hit him in the affections is unjustifiable meanness. Come what might, Guy felt there was but one thing now left for it. He must go straight downstairs again, in spite of shame or exposure, and restore that purse, ill-gotten gains and all, to that blood-sucker of an evil and inequitable social system, its lawful owner.

He opened the door once more, and peered out grimly into the passage. With head on one side, he strained his ear and listened. Not a sound in the house; not a creature stirring anywhere. With the purse in one hand, while he held his beating heart to keep it still with the other, Guy crept along the dark passage, and stole stealthily down the stairs, that creaked as he went with those pistol-shot creaks peculiar to stairs in the night when you're trying to tread softly. In the corridor below he could see his way better, for the moonlight from the open window at the end of it guided him. He stepped out on to the balcony, and walked with a throbbing breast to Sir Richard's window. Oh, mercy! it was closed. No chance of restitution. He tried it with his hand; it was fastened from within. The sleeper must have risen, roused by his flight, and shut it.

For a minute or two Guy hesitated. Should he rap at the panes, and try to attract the man's attention? But, no; to do that would be to expose himself unnecessarily to assault and battery; and if purses are sacred, our persons are surely a great deal sacreder. After a brief debate on the balcony in the cold, Guy came to the conclusion that it would be wisest now to return to his own room and wait for the morning before making restitution.

He didn't undress that night; he flung himself on the bed, and tossed and turned in a fever of doubt till morning. Very early he rose up, and washed and dressed himself. Then, as soon as he thought there was any chance of Sir Richard being about, he walked boldly down the stairs, and, with trembling steps, made for the man's bedroom.

He knocked at the door twice, rather loudly. No answer. Was the fellow asleep still, then? Hadn't he dozed off the effects of that sparkling Moselle yet? Guy knocked a third time, still louder than before, and got no response. He turned the handle slightly, and peeped into the room. The bed was empty. Sir Richard must be up, and must have missed his money.

With heart on fire, the unhappy young burglar hurried down the front stairs, expecting to find the police already on his track. The man must have missed his purse, and risen early in search of it! As he went, a jovial voice sounded loud in the office:—

"It's my own fault, of course," the voice was saying, good-humouredly, in very bluff English. "I don't blame anybody else for it. I'm afraid I got a little too much of that jolly good Moselle of yours on board last night, Herr Landlord; and the German officers and I took to bally-ragging in the billiard-room; and by the time I went to bed, I don't deny I was a trifle top-heavy. But I wanted to pay my bill and go off this morning, for I have a serious appointment on Monday in London. It's awkward, very."

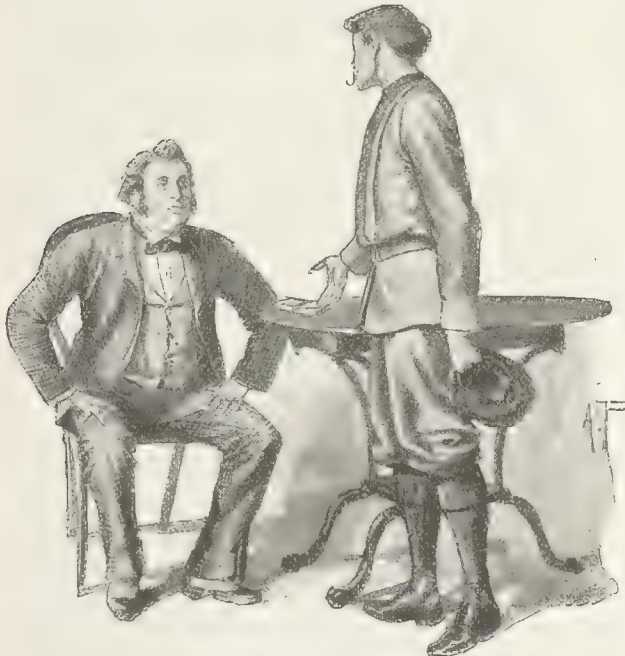
The landlord was profuse in his protestations and apologies. Such a thing had never happened in his house before. He couldn't understand it. He would communicate with the police, and do everything in his power to have the purse recovered. Furthermore, if Sir Richard wished to go to London, the landlord (rubbing his hands) had known him so long and so well, it would give him the greatest pleasure on earth to let the bill stand over and to lend him £20 till the cash was restored and the thief was punished.

"I don't say there's any thief, though, mind you," the jovial voice responded, most candidly. "I expect it was all my own stupid carelessness. I'm such an ass of a fellow always for leaving money about; and as likely as not I pulled the thing out with my handkerchief in the billiard-room. I don't doubt it'll turn up, sooner or later some day, when you're cleaning the house up. If it don't"—the jovial voice sank for a moment to a lower key—"it's not so much the money itself I mind—that's only a few hundred pounds, and some circular notes which can't be negotiated—it's the letters and papers and private mementos. There were things in that purse"—and the voice still sank lower to an unexpected softness—"that I wouldn't have lost—well, not for a good many thousands."

Guy's heart smote him at these words with poignant remorse. He thought of the child's hair, and blushed crimson with shame. Erect and solemn he strode into the office. "Sir Richard Lavers," he said, slowly, "I want to speak with you alone one moment in the salon."

"Eh?" Sir Richard said, sharply, turning round. "Oh, it's you. Why, certainly." And he followed the painter into the room with a somewhat sheepish air, like a detected felon.

Guy shut the door tight. Then he laid down that cursed thing with a shudder on the table. "There's your purse," he said, curtly, without one word of explanation.



"THERE'S YOUR PURSE."

Sir Richard looked at it with distinct pleasure. "You picked it up?" he said, smiling.

"No," Guy answered, disdaining to tell a lie; "I stole it."

Sir Richard sat down on a chair, with his hands on his knees, and stared at him curiously for ninety seconds. Then he burst into a loud laugh, and exclaimed, much amused, "Well, anyhow, there's no reason to pull such a long face about it."

Guy dropped into a seat opposite him, and told him all his tale, extenuating nothing, in frank self-accusation. Sir Richard listened intent, with a smile on his mouth and a twinkle in his eyes of good-natured acquiescence.

"Then it was you who woke me up," he said, "when I went to shut the window? Well, you're a deuced brave chap, that's all I've got to say, to come this morning and tell me the truth about it. Why didn't you say you picked it up in the passage? I led up to it straight. That's what beats me utterly."

"Because it would have been a lie," Guy answered,

frankly. "And I'd rather own up than tell you a lie about it."

Sir Richard opened the purse and turned the things over carefully. "Why, it's all here, right enough," he said, in a tone of bland surprise. "You haven't taken anything out of it!"

"No, of course not," Guy replied, almost smiling, in spite of himself, at the man's perfect *naïveté*.

Sir Richard eyed him hard with a curiously amused glance. "But, I say, look here, you know," he remonstrated, quietly; "you are a precious inefficient sort of burglar, aren't you? You won't have anything now to pay your bill with on Monday." For Guy had not concealed from him the plain reason for his onslaught upon the sacred rights of property.

"No, I must do without as best I can," Guy answered, somewhat glum. For he still stood face to face with that original problem.

Sir Richard stared at him once more with that same curious expression. "Tell me," he said, after a short pause, "did you look at any of the letters or things in this pocket-book?"

"Not one," Guy answered, honestly, with the ring of truth in his voice. "I saw they were private, and I abstained from touching them. Only," he added, after a second's hesitation, "I couldn't help seeing there was a lock of light hair in a paper in one place. And of that, I felt sure, it would be wicked to deprive you."

The baronet said nothing. He only gazed at his man fixedly. A suspicion of moisture lurked in his blue eyes. "Well, as long as I've got the papers," he murmured at last, after a long pause, "I don't mind about the tin. That was really a secondary consideration."

"And now," Guy said, sturdily, "if you'll send for the police and tell the landlord, I'll give myself into custody on the charge of robbery."

Sir Richard rose and fronted him. For one moment he was serious. "Now, look here, young man," he said, with an air of paternal wisdom, "don't you go and be a something-or-other fool. Don't say one word of this to the landlord or anybody. You are a deuced clever fellow, and you can paint like one o'clock. That's a precious good thing of yours, that view of the ramshackled old Schloss on the Drachenfels. You're sure to rise in the end; you've the right cut of the jib for it. Now, you take my advice, and keep this thing quiet. If you don't peach of it, I won't—word of honour of a gentleman. And if you'll allow me, I'll lend you fifty pounds. You can pay me back right enough when you're elected to the Academy."

Guy Lethbridge's face grew red as fire. That the man should forgive him was bad enough in all conscience, but that he should offer him a loan was really dreadful. It's all very well for a virtuous citizen to relieve the over-weening aristocrat of his superfluous wealth with the high hand of confiscation; but to take it as a gift from him—for a gift it would practically mean—and that at the very moment when one had to acknowledge an attempted crime, revolted every sentiment of Guy Lethbridge's nature.

He drew back with a stammered "No, thank you. It's very kind of you, but—of course, I couldn't." And then there arose between them the most comic episode of expostulation and persuasion that the rooms of the Berliner-Hof had ever yet witnessed. The baronet almost lost his temper over the young man's obstinacy. It was ridiculous, he urged, for any gentleman not to accept a loan of fifty pounds from a well-disposed person in a moment of emergency. A fellow who could paint like that could never want long; and as for the passing impulse which had led Guy to take charge of the purse for an hour or two—why, the upshot showed it was *only* a passing impulse; and we all make mistakes in moments of effusion, late at night, after dining. Besides, a man in Guy's position must be really hard up, and no mistake, before he thinks of relieving other people of their purses. And when a fellow's hard up, well, hang it all, my dear sir, you can't blame him

for deviating into eccentric action. As for the fifty pounds, if Guy didn't take it, it'd go upon a horse, no doubt, or a supper at the Gaiety, or something equally foolish. Let him be sensible and pocket it; no harm in a loan; and to be quite frank, Sir Richard said, he thought better of him for owning up to his fault so manfully, than he'd have thought of him if he'd never yielded at all to temptation.

Guy stood firm, however, and refused to the bitter end.

Sir Richard consulted his watch.

"Halloa," he said, starting, "I can't stand here squabbling over fifty pounds with you all the morning. I've got to catch the 9.25 to Cologne; my things are all packed; I must have my coffee. Now, before I go, for the last time, will you or won't you accept that little loan from me? Mind, you're a conscientious kind of chap, and your bill's due on Monday. You've got no right to defraud your landlord when a friend's prepared to help you tide over this temporary difficulty."

That was a hard home-thrust. Guy admitted the logic of it. But he stood by his guns still, and shook his head firmly. All sense of sullenness and defiance was gone from him now. The man's genuine kind-heartedness and sympathy had conquered him.

"Sir," he cried, wringing his new friend's hand with unaffected warmth, "you're a brick; and you make me ashamed of myself. But *please* don't press it upon me. I *couldn't* take it now. Your kindness has broken me." And he burst into tears with a sudden impulse as he rushed to the window to hide his emotion.



"HE RUSHED TO THE WINDOW."

Sir Richard hummed an air and left the salon abruptly. Guy went up to his own room, locked himself in all alone, and had a bad half-hour of it with his own conscience. He was roused from his reverie at the end of that time by a double knock at the door. It was the German waiter. "Wit' Sir Richard's compliments," he said, handing a letter to Guy. The painter tore the envelope open. It contained—fifty pounds in English bank-notes, and accompanying them this surprising letter:—

"DEAR MR. LETHBRIDGE,—You *must* accept enclosed few notes as a loan for the present. You see, the fact is, I'm not a baronet at all, but a bookmaker and bank swindler. The letters you didn't examine in my purse would have put the police on my track; and I therefore regard this trifling little sum as really due to you. You need have no compunction about taking it, for it isn't mine, and you can't possibly return it to its proper owner. Take it without a scruple, and settle your bill—you can repay me whenever you next meet me. You're a long-sight a better man than I am, anyhow.—Yours faithfully,
"RICHARD LAVERS."

Guy crumpled it up in his hand with an impatient gesture. Take a swindler's money! Inconceivable! Impossible! He seized his hat in his haste, and rushed down to the office.

"Where's he gone?" he cried to the landlord.

And the landlord, taking his sense, answered promptly: "To the station."

Guy tore down the road, and rushed into the building just as the Cologne train was steaming out from the platform. He ran along its side, disregarding the vehement expostulations of portly, red-banded German officialdom. Soon he spied the dubious baronet alone in a first-class compartment. Crumpling the notes into a pellet, he flung them back at him fiercely.

"How could you?" he cried, all on fire. "More than ever, now, when I know who you are, I can't touch those notes—I can't look at your money!"

In another second that jovial face leaned, all smiles, out of the window.

"You confounded fool!" the loud voice burst forth, merrily, "you're the hardest chap to befriend I ever yet came across. Do you think, if what I said in that letter was true, I'd be ass enough to confess it—and in writing too—to a casual acquaintance? Take your tennis-ball back again!" and the pellet hit Guy hard on the cheek at the words. "Settle your bill like a man; and if ever you want to pay me back in return, you can find my address any day in Debrett or Foster."

By this time even Sir Richard's stentorian voice was almost past bawling-point. There was nothing left for it now but to pick up the notes and return to the Berliner-Hof. Though whether he should use them or not to pay his bill was a point of casuistry he had still to debate upon.

Next morning's post, however, brought him a note from Cologne, which placed the whole question in an unexpected light for him:—

"DEAR MR. LETHBRIDGE,—We've both been fools. My ruse was a silly one. How extraordinary the right way out of this little difficulty didn't at once occur to me! I was awfully taken by your picture of the ramshackled old Schloss; in fact, I thought when I could look up its price in the Academy catalogue I'd probably buy it, if it wasn't too dear for me. But the heat of the moment put this idea altogether out of my head. Shall we say £200 as the price of the picture? the balance to be paid on delivery in London. Now think no more of the rest, and remain well assured that if ever this little episode gets abroad in the world it will *not* be through the instrumentality of—Yours very sincerely,
"RICHARD LAVERS."

Sir Richard has settled down now as a respectable county member; and, except when occasionally exhilarated with champagne, is really a most useful pillar of society. He's very proud of a picture in his dining-room of Sorrento from the Castellammare Road—a companion-piece to that exquisite autumnal view of the ruin on the Drachenfels and the Seven Mountains. Both are from the brush of that rising young Associate, Mr. Guy Lethbridge, whom Sir Richard discovered and introduced to the great world; but the frame of the Sorrento bears a neat little inscription: "For Sir Richard Lavers, from his ever grateful and affectionate friend, the painter." The owner has been offered five hundred down for the Drachenfels more than once—and has refused the offer.

Catissou.

By Jules Claretie.

I.

THE corporal sat astride a cane-bottomed chair in front of the gendarme quarters at Pierrebuffière and smoked his pipe; slowly the smoke curled upwards in regular lines, forming circles which gradually expanded, quivered, and finally vanished in the warm air of this July evening.

Martial Tharaud had seen many similar circles of smoke act in just the same way above the cannon's mouth.

He was now taking life easily in his little garden, the head of a family, with a corporal's stripes on his sleeve, and wished for nothing better—not even to become sergeant, because then he would probably have to go to Eymoutiers, Saint-Léonard, or Limoges. He was fond of his little corner at Pierrebuffière, fond of those roses which he had grafted himself, and fond of that creeping plant which ran along the white walls of the house and hung in wreaths around the tin tricolour flag suspended over the door.

As the corporal smoked he watched some boys who, at a short distance from him, were playing upon a hillock at the game of *pique-romme*, in which they threw long, pointed pieces of iron into the ground, as though throwing at a target. Occasionally he cried warningly to them: "Take care, there, youngsters; mind you don't run them into your feet!"

Then he turned round and looked over his shoulder through the open window at a pretty, dark-complexioned woman, still young, who was bustling about the kitchen, where the pots and pans shone like silver; he smiled at her and said, as he puffed away: "They *are* having a game, the little rascals!"

Then the woman with bare arms—nice white arms, half covered with flour—came to the window-sill, put her jolly, energetic-looking face (red with the heat of the stove) out of the window and looked towards the boys, who were excitedly throwing their pieces of iron at the mark.

"Go along! there's no danger! Besides, it makes them skilful and brave!"

"And gives them an appetite for your *clafoutis*, Catissou!"

The *clafoutis*—a Limousin dish as solid as the thick cabbage soup of the country districts—was already baking in the oven, with its black cherries stuck in the flour like bricks in mortar.

"Is the *clafoutis* cooking all right?" asked the corporal.

And Catissou shrugged her shoulders as if to say: "Are you foolish? Is your house-keeper in the habit of neglecting her pastry?"

II.

"A good woman," said Martial Tharaud to us a moment afterwards, as we passed him with a nod.

He was in the humour for a gossip.

"Yes, yes" (he became loquacious when speaking of Catissou), "she's a good woman; and a sturdy woman, too. To see her make the kettle boil and wash the children—we have three, all boys; see them over there?—nobody would believe she had been on show at the fairs! And yet it's true enough! Oh, it's quite a story! I'll tell you all about it.

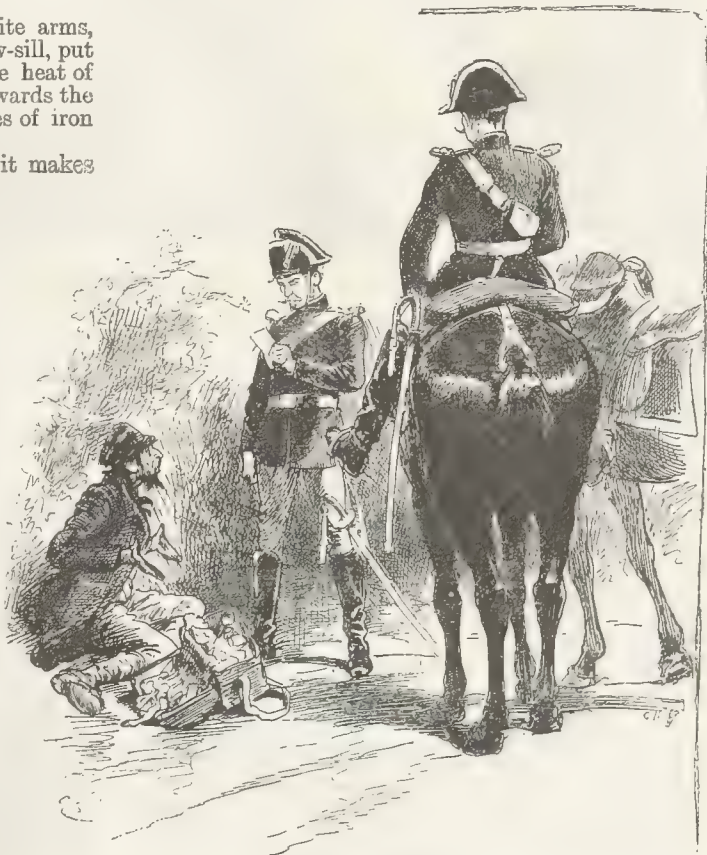
"It is about ten years ago—I had just left the chasseurs and entered the gendarmerie at Limoges, and that suited me,

because I belong to that part. The adjutant told us one morning that there was a splendid capture to be made. A worthy old man named Coussac, a foreman builder, had been murdered in his own house at Montmailler, and there was no clue to the identity of the assassin. That was in September. We had to search the highways and byways; and the adjutant, M. Boudet (he's captain now), told the sergeant, the corporals, and the men to redouble their vigilance and keep their eyes open; and if we met any suspicious-looking persons under the chestnut trees or along the high roads we were to seize them without hesitation and haul them up before the authorities.

"Information had been sent all over the district, and also to Châteauneuf, Ambazac, everywhere, even to Bellac. In a word, the whole department was on the alert.

"Now, it's all very fine to tell you to arrest all suspicious-looking individuals, but you must not always judge by appearances. There are many worthy people who have very evil-looking faces. Why, I knew a man whose looks would have brought him to the guillotine or the galleys; yet he was a man who might have taken a prize for upright conduct! It's true enough! He gave away all he had to the poor—a perfect saint, my word on it! And there are others who look like saints, but who ought to have the handcuffs put on at once.

"Still, we were told to arrest them; and so we did. We ran in some of those natives of Lorraine who come to Sauviat and Saint-Yrieix to buy china-ware, you know, we took up hawkers, old men, yellow-looking beggars—as



"WE TOOK UP HAWKERS."

yellow as their bags; and we even ran in some silly people who were roaming about without any knowledge of the place. But not one of them was capable of giving that filip to old Coussac. So the time went on, and we could not lay hands on the Montmailler murderer.

"And it wasn't an easy thing at all to find out who had killed the old foreman builder. We had scarcely any clue, and we did not know how to set to work.

"Well! one day I was at the gendarme quarters, about to curry-comb my horse, when a handsome young woman, with eyes like sloes and lips as red as cherries, came up to me and said: 'Well! have you any news of the murderer after all this time? I am the daughter of Léonard Coussac.'

"It made me start when I heard that, I tell you! She spoke so energetically, and her eyes flashed so angrily, that I felt as though I ought to be ashamed of myself for not having taken a grip of the collar of that scoundrel who had killed the young woman's father. Then I tried to clear myself by explaining that it was not exactly our fault, that we had very little information about the murderer, and so on; but she looked at me straight in the eyes in such a manner that I felt I was making a mess of it.

"Now, look here, miss,' I said suddenly, stopping in the midst of my excuses. 'I would willingly risk an arm or a leg, if necessary, to catch that scoundrel!' And I meant it, too. And it wasn't exactly what you call—professional duty which made me say it. It was those confounded black eyes which seemed all on fire. 'But, you see, we want a clue!'

"A clue?' Then she shrugged her shoulders. 'What about the hand?' she asked. 'Isn't that a clue?'

"The hand? What hand?'

Then Catherine Coussac—her name was Catherine, *Catissou* in our country dialect—told me the story of the crime, a story which, I confess, made my blood run cold."

III.

"It was one September evening when poor old Coussac was killed, and it was as warm as a summer day. In his house he had the money which Mr. Sabourdy, the contractor he worked for, had left with him before starting for Guéret. He had about ten thousand francs besides that, for he had to pay the men and meet two bills which would be due in two or three days. It was Saturday. After he had paid the men, the foreman builder returned home, pleased, and with a good appetite. He ate his cabbage soup and some dumplings, and after the meal his mother went upstairs to rest on the bed, as she was rather tired, while old Coussac and his daughter Catissou remained in the downstairs room, sitting near the chest where the money was. He was reading the *Almanach Limousin*, which had just come out, and she was knitting a woollen stocking.

"You must understand that Coussac's rooms were at the back of the house, overlooking the garden. The one on the ground floor, in which Coussac and his daughter were then sitting, had a window about five feet from the ground, with inside shutters, which were usually closed in the evening; but that evening the window had been left slightly open, because the old man

felt rather warm. He was reading by the light of a shaded lamp, and Catissou heard him turn over the pages of the *Almanach* at regular intervals. She has often told me that, as she was working away mechanically, the tick-tick of the clock, and the rustle of the paper as the leaves were regularly turned over, made her feel drowsy.

"Suddenly she lifted her head from her work with a yawn to see if it wasn't time to go to bed, and she saw—she thought at first that she was mistaken or dreaming—she saw between the shutters a hand, a big hand, a thick, wide hand with something terrifying about it, something which Catissou noticed at once—the four fingers were almost as thick as the thumb, and were all the same size, and all as long as one another, just as if they had been cut off at a certain point. But they had not been cut off, for they had nails; only they all finished in a line. This frightful hand, with the spatulated fingers—that's what Dr. Boutsilloux called them—glided along the shutters like a great spider, and it was evidently trying to push back the shutters without making a noise; it remained there almost motionless as

Catissou looked up, as though the man to whom it belonged guessed that she was looking at it.

"For a moment Catherine thought that her eyes had been affected by the light of the lamp, causing her to see black and red spots as you do when you look at the sun. She opened them wide, and saw the hand gliding over the wood-work nearer and nearer. Catissou could no longer doubt the reality of what she saw, and tried to cry out; but she seemed choked, as if the hand were strangling her, and she could not utter a sound.

"She jumped up, stretched her arm out towards Coussac, and shook him by the sleeve, pointing to the terrible hand at the window. But, at the very moment when old Coussac turned and perceived the hand,

the shutter was pushed violently back and the window opened very quickly, which caused the door of the room to open, admitting a draught of air which blew out the lamp and left Catherine and her father in the dark.

"Then there was the noise of a heavy body jumping into the room, and Coussac endeavoured to find a knife in the drawer of the table on which he was reading—a knife to defend himself, and, above all, Catissou and Mr. Sabourdy's money; but, before he could open the drawer, he was seized by the throat, and felt something cold enter his body under the neck near the heart. Catissou could see nothing, but she guessed what was taking place, and she uttered a scream. Bang! A blow from a fist like a hammer on her head, and she fell senseless. The man must have had cat's eyes; he could see everything, and took good aim. If Catissou was not killed by the knife, it was because it had broken off short; still, the fist was enough for the man's purpose in her case.

"How long the poor girl remained insensible, she could not say; but when she came to herself she was still in the lower room, and her grandmother in her night-dress, with a face as white as a sheet, was trying to restore poor old Léonard, who was dying.



"WHAT ABOUT THE HAND?" SHE ASKED."



"THE HAND."

"Of course you can guess that the chest had been broken open, and the thousand-franc notes stolen.

"What an awful night that was! It will be many a long day before it is forgotten in the Montmailler suburb. The neighbours were called up, the garden was searched, a guard put round the houses, and the houses searched from top to bottom. They found the imprints of iron-tipped boots in the flower-beds; instructions were given that these marks should not be touched, and the size was carefully measured. Every place round about was searched, but to no purpose. And, in the meantime, Coussac was dying, and his mother, half crazy with grief and rage, was saying what she would do if she only got hold of the assassin.

"As for Catherine, who was half mad too, the sight of that terrible hand, with the four fingers of the same length, gliding over the oaken shutter like a field-spider or a crab-fish, was continually before her eyes.

"You can guess that everything that could be done was done to find the wretch who had sent the worthy man to 'Louyat,' that's what they call the cemetery at Limoges; the parson told me that the name comes from 'Alleluia.' Yes, everything possible was done, but I say again there was no clue! Of course, there was the hand, as Catissou told me at the barracks; but nobody knew a man with a hand like that in the whole of that part of the country—he would soon have been noticed. They questioned the men who worked with old Coussac, one after another. No, they did not know anyone with such a fist; and you could not suspect any of them. They were all decent fellows; they liked to wet their whistles a bit, but that isn't a crime. Besides, none of them knew that Mr. Sabourdy had left other money than the wages with Coussac. Who, then, could the rascal be who had such a hand as Catissou had seen?

"One day a journeyman butcher came and told us that he well remembered one day having quarrelled with a big, evil-looking fellow, who had pulled out a knife; and the butcher had noticed, as he had pulled out this Nontron knife from his pocket, that this fellow had a very peculiar hand, a big, hairy hand, with all the fingers of the same size! Now, the knife that had killed Léonard Coussac was a Nontron knife. But the butcher knew nothing about this man, and nobody else had seen the fellow at Limoges, so we could only believe that the butcher was humbugging us. And still the hunt went on, but it was no good; and I was in a rare state about it, I was, for I had said to Catissou, looking her full in the face: 'Come, Miss Catissou, answer me plainly: what would you give to the one who brought your

father's murderer to you with a rope round his neck?' and she had not answered in words, but had become quite pale, and you should have seen her eyes, her beautiful black eyes! They were full of tears, and they promised—something!

"Still, even that could not help me to find the wretch.

"At last, seeing that not one of the 12th, from the colonel to the last gendarme, could put his hand upon the fellow, Catherine said: 'Very well, if you can't find him, I will!'

"She left her situation as dress-maker, and asked the police authorities for permission to take part in the fairs. That surprised us all; but it surprised me especially, when in every place where there was any entertainment on, we saw a large canvas poster with a portrait of Catherine Coussac, dressed in pink tights, with a red velvet jacket, short skirt, and copper fish-scales; and above this picture were the words, in big letters, *Woman Torpedo Fish*.

"What a name! It was quite strange enough for Catherine to mix up with mountebanks at all—although they are as good as other people, aye, and even better than a good many other people we meet. Still, it was surprising enough for her to become a strolling player, or such like; but *Woman Torpedo Fish*, that beat all!



"WE SAW A LARGE CANVAS POSTER."

Of course you know that the torpedo is a fish which gives you an electric shock if you touch it—a fish which seems to have an electric machine in its body. Well, by some electrical arrangement, when you touched Catherine Coussac's hand you received an electric shock.

"It was not necessary for me to *touch* her to be electrified; I only had to *look* at her. Look at her now; she is twenty-eight and a little stouter, but she's still pretty. Well, ten years ago, when she used to wear that lace cap on her black hair—that lace cap which the silly women have thrown aside for hats like the ladies wear—well, very few people who passed her went on their way without looking back at her! Such a figure she had! and such a complexion! There were some handsome girls in Limoges, but Catherine was the handsomest, though I say it as shouldn't.

"Didn't she draw the people to the booth! She didn't want a big band like the *Corvi Circus*, nor a lot of gag like the troupe which plays the *Tor de Nesle*. Not a bit of it; she just showed herself, people said, 'I say, that's a pretty girl!' and they went in."

IV.

"ONE day, at Magnac Laval—it was Shrove Tuesday—I went in with the other people to see the *Woman Torpedo Fish*. There she was on a little stage, and old Mrs. Coussac, Léonard's mother, sat below, squatting like a witch, and frowning at everyone who came in, as though she would like to throw a spell upon them. Since the murder of her son, she had become sullen, and she scarcely said anything but 'So they won't take him to the guillotine, the rascal who killed my son!'

"I stepped forward. Catherine recognised me, and, as I stopped in front of her, and thought how well the costume suited her, she smiled, and said to me in a significant tone: 'Oh, it is you; but it isn't *your* hand I am looking for.' And her black eyes blazed again, with a look of madness almost.

"Then I understood what the brave girl was doing. Then I knew why she was going all over the country, disguised as a mountebank. The recollection of that frightful hand was always present, and she held out her own white little hand—as soft as satin, but as strong as a vice—to everyone, hoping in this way to recognise the hand with the fingers all of the same size.

"That was her own idea! That was the only clue, but it would be sufficient for her she thought. It was not an easy task to find that fellow—almost as bad as looking for a needle in a haystack. And yet there is always a chance that a murderer will come and prowl round the scene of his crime. Blood seems to attract like a magnet, that's what I think. Of course, the man had fled from Limoges after the crime, and might still be far away, but he would come back and have a look at Montmailler at some time or other; so the *Woman Torpedo Fish* had the chances in her favour that she would see him again and recognise that hand—that hand which seemed to haunt her to such an extent that she has told me she has often dreamt it was round her neck, strangling her.

"In this way Catherine went about from place to place with old Mrs. Coussac. The electric woman's van went wherever it could, drawn by an old horse which had served in the gendarmerie. From fair to fair they dragged along, the mother and the daughter, and they must have covered miles enough to make a journey round the world. They saw Auvergne, Bordeaux, Angoulême, Tours, and right on to Orléans—and a good many other places, too, in the south. But it was in the department of Haute-Vienne that they felt most confident of success. They said to each other: 'That is where he did it, and that is where he will be taken!' A superstitious idea, perhaps, but you can't help such things.

"Women soon get at the bottom of things, I tell you. They are as artful as can be.

"Well, one day—I remember it as if it was yesterday, it was the 22nd of May and a Tuesday also—the booths were making no end of a row upon the Place Royale—Place de la République. There were roundabouts, wax-works, athletic sports, performing monkey, Pezon's menagerie, everything you could think of, including, of course, the *Woman Torpedo Fish*.

"Catherine, fresh as a daisy, walked about on the platform outside, pointing to the picture of herself and crying out: 'Walk up, walk up, ladies and gentlemen! Just about to begin!' while poor old widow Coussac, looking a hundred years old, as yellow as a guinea, as thin as a rake, and coughing in a way that made your heart ache, glared around at the people.

"'Walk up, walk up, walk up!'

"I walked up like the other people, except that, as I went in, I said 'Good morning, miss,' to Catissou.

"'Good morning, gendarme,' she answered.

"She knew my name perfectly well, but she only gave me my title. It seemed to me that it was as good as saying: 'Although you are a gendarme, you don't know how to nab people who murder poor old men, do you?' and, besides, she had a right to call me 'gendarme,' because I was in uniform.

"Well, there I was inside. There were about twenty persons in the booth, men and women; and while Catissou smiled at them, old Mrs. Coussac, squatting in a corner, glared at them as usual.

"I can see it all now, just as if I was there. Catissou, standing on the stage with a red curtain for the background, with spangles in her hair, a rose in her breast, and as a contrast to all this red, a pair of plump, white arms, and pretty shoulders, and a head—well, a head pretty enough to turn the heads of all the men who saw her. The sun shone through the canvas upon Catissou, making the imitation fish-scales, which she had sewn upon her garments, shine like diamonds.

"There she was, explaining to the audience what sort of a thing this electric fish is, where it lives, how the Arabs call it 'Thunder,' and what a shock it gives you, as if you had been struck by lightning; and how—but there, it's all done with now, and very likely Catissou herself has forgotten it, although she has said it so many times. But she had it at her fingers' ends at that time, and said it right off as pat as a lawyer; and the audience sat with their mouths wide open taking it all in, and devouring Catissou with their eyes, which proves that they had good taste.

"After that, she held out her hand as usual, and said to them: 'Walk up and shake hands and feel the electric shock! Don't be afraid; it won't hurt you!' All hands were held out to touch Catissou's dainty little hand; some laughed at the sensation, others shook their hands and looked rather angry.

"I sat there, looking on and feeling just a little jealous at all those people mauling Catherine's pretty hand, when all at once I saw her go as pale as death, and spring upon one of the hands like a dog at a piece of meat.

"Right in front of her stood a tall, herculean fellow, with curly red hair showing under a fur cap. He wore a starched blue blouse over a countryman's jacket, and had wide, square shoulders, a protruding lower jaw—I was looking at him sideways—and temples that hid his eyes from anyone looking at him from my position. No beard, only a few hairs visible on his white, dull face. An evil-looking face it was. Catissou was looking him straight in the face, and holding his hand—it seemed enormous in her small, woman's hand—in a frenzied grasp, as if her life depended upon it.

"A shiver passed through me, and I said to myself: 'That's the man!'

"Yes, she held him; held him with all her might. And she said to the great fellow, who had suddenly turned as pale as she had:—

"'Who killed Léonard Coussac?'

"He started back and tried to free his hand from the grasp of the *Woman Torpedo Fish*. Ah! Catissou



"WHO KILLED LEONARD COUSSAC?"

didn't require any electrical arrangement to give *that* man a shock! He drew back his hand without being able to get it out of Catherine's grasp. 'Let me go, will you?' he said, trying to push her away. 'Are you mad?' He turned his head this way and that way, his eyes, wild with rage and fear, looking for a way of escape.

"Wretch!" cried Catissou, sinking her fingers in his flesh as she tried to tighten her grasp, 'it was *you* who did it—you! *you*! *you*!'

"She shook him as a dog does a rat, and he was so stupefied, he did not know what to do. But he soon recovered himself. He got his hand free from Catherine's fingers and dealt her a blow with it on the shoulder, which made her sink on her knees; then he turned towards the door like a wild boar.

"The audience was scared and made a rush for the door. The man made a bound, pushing the people before him, when I, by a quick movement, placed myself in front of him. He was a head taller than I was, and an evil look appeared on his face as I lifted my arm and seized him by the blouse.

"I arrest you in the name of the law!"

"His reply was a blow, which would have sent me rolling, perhaps, if I had not been rendered strong by the presence of Catherine. As it was, I took very little notice of it, and held him tight, struggling with him and dragging him about. I wouldn't loose him: you would have had to cut my hand off first. And all the time he was trying to stun me or break my skull by hitting me about the head. All at once—whizz—a knife sank into my flesh just below the neck, in the very same place as old Coussac had been struck. I have the scar now. Seems to have been the usual place for the rascal to strike!

"He reckoned on killing me, but the collar of my uniform stopped

the blow a bit, and the blade of the knife—a Nontron knife, with a yellow handle—cut the collar clean through and gave me a nick in the flesh, that's all.

"I gripped the wrist of the hand that held the knife and held it above my head. If it came down again, it would be all up with me—*me*, a gendarme! So the knife was in the air over my head like the sword of Damo—what do you call him, Damocles?—yes, Damocles; and round the handle of the knife were the four fingers, all the same size, which had enabled Catherine Coussac to recognise the murderer of her father.

"I suppose the struggle did last some little time, but it seemed much longer to me. The blood was running from my wound, and I felt I was losing strength. I must leave go of the arm, and the knife would—! I made an effort; then, just in the nick of time, the good-for-nothing rascal gave a yell—such a yell it was! He gave a jump and started backwards as if to free himself from something, and he stepped backwards so quickly that he fell over something on to the ground, dragging me with him. He had fallen over old Mrs. Coussac, who had actually bitten him in the leg as the best way to make him leave go of me.

"We struggled about on the floor, but not for long. Catherine was up and helped me by getting the knife away from him, and I fastened my right hand on his throat and nearly strangled him. Then up

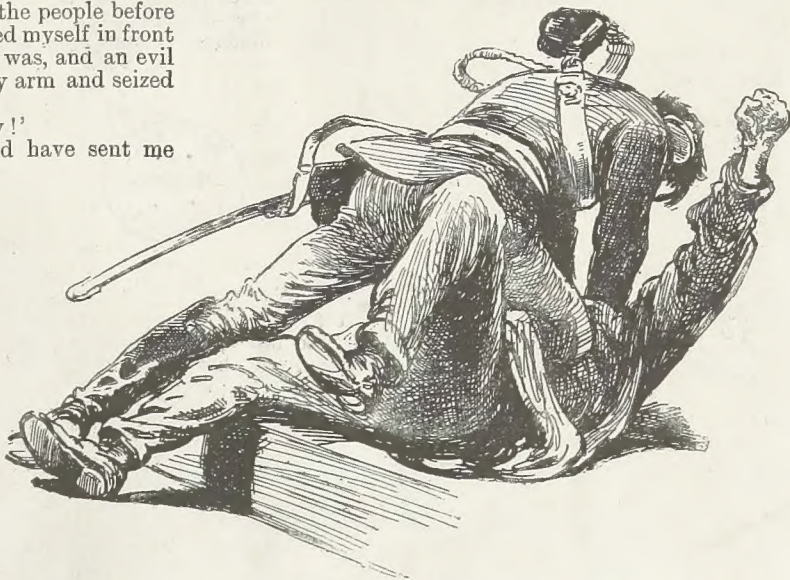
came Sergeant Bugead and a comrade, attracted by the noise, and we soon had the handcuffs on the fellow, and they took him off through the crowd, who, now that he was unable to do anything, became very brave and wanted to lynch him.

"It was about time that help came, for I was done up. I felt myself going, and I fainted from loss of blood—fainted! Wasn't it silly for a gendarme to faint?

"And as I went off I had a feeling that I was being supported by a pair of white arms, and above me I fancied I could see, not the Nontron knife, but Catherine's eyes, looking tenderly at me."

V.

"WELL, that's how a good marriage was brought about. My wound got well, of course, or you wouldn't see me



WE STRUGGLED ABOUT ON THE FLOOR.

here ; but it got well twice as quick because Catherine looked after it. And when I got about again, she said plainly : ' Look here, now ! You suit me and I suit you. I swear I'll be a good wife to you ! ' Catherine's marriage was the last pleasure old Mrs. Coussac enjoyed, poor old woman ! No ! I make a mistake ; her last piece of happiness was hearing that sentence had been passed on the murderer of Léonard Coussac.

"He turned out to be a bricklayer's labourer who had applied to Mr. Sabourdy for work, and had overheard about the money being intrusted to old Coussac. His greed had been excited, and he had committed the murder. He had done it quite alone ; no accomplice. After the murder he had gone to Paris, then come back to Guéret, and then to Limoges ; all the money gone and on the look-out for work. And he evidently wasn't particular what sort of work, either ! He hardly took the trouble to defend himself at the trial. He seemed to say : ' You've got me. So much the worse for me ! ' He was condemned to death. He tried to cheat the executioner by knocking his head against the wall of his cell. But he didn't succeed, and the executioner had him, after all.

"At the trial the judge complimented me. I don't say that for the sake of boasting, but because it's true. But I had no need of his compliments, nor of anything else. I had got Catissou, and that was enough for me. However, on the wedding-day, my captain's wedding gift was a corporal's stripes ; and I tell you I was pleased at that. And since then—well, if you want to see a happy man, look at me !

"Catissou has had ever so many offers from theatrical managers to go on show—even from Australia. The newspapers had been full of her, and that made the managers eager to get her. But Catissou only laughed at it. She's got something else to do now. She has to wash the children, pipeclay my epaulettes, look after the poultry, and superintend the house—and she does superintend the house, too, and the corporal as well !

"No, no ! Catissou is not an artiste. But if there should ever be a crime committed in these parts, and they can't find the man who did it, I wouldn't mind backing Catissou against all the detectives they like to employ !"

VI.

THE corporal knocked out the ashes of his pipe on his left thumb-nail, and was about to fill up again, when Catherine Tharaud came to the door, making a pretty picture surrounded by the creeping plant, with the rays of the setting sun falling upon her.

"Come along, Martial," she said, with a pleasant smile, "the *clafoutis* is ready, and the soup, too. Call the little ones."

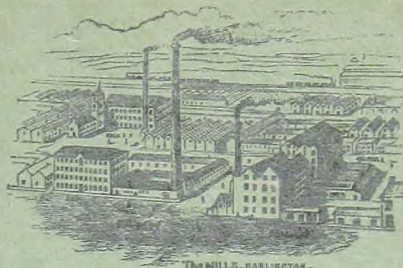
Martial Tharaud arose, put his hands up to his mouth, and called out to the boys, who were still enjoying their game :—

"Halloa, there ! Come along, you little rascals ! Soup is ready !"

The boys ran up to him, and, as they all went inside, he took off his military cap and gaily saluted us.



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